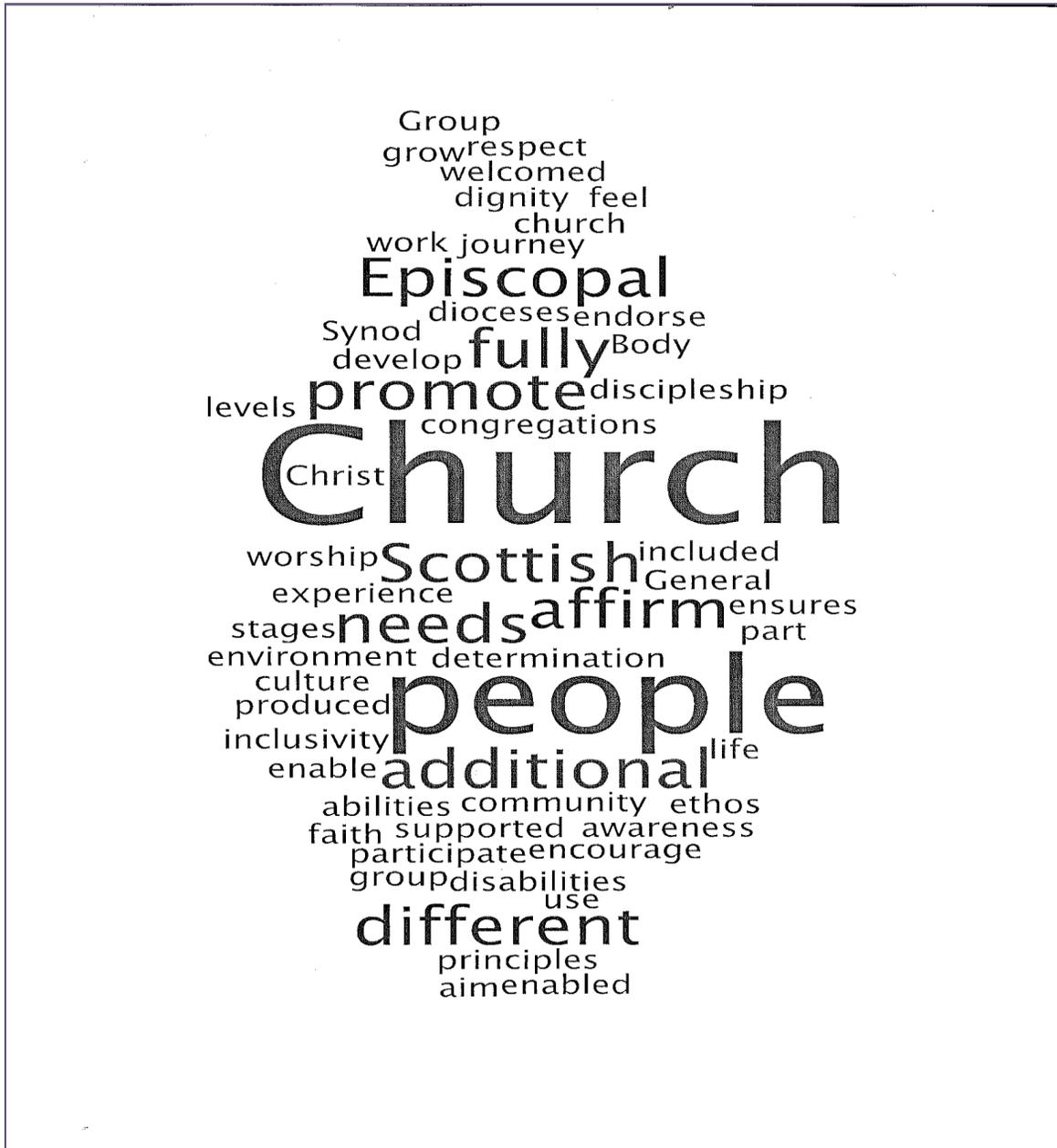


# HOW TO MAKE YOUR CHURCH ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE

## GUIDELINES FROM THE SCOTTISH EPISCOPAL CHURCH



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### Introduction

We are all made in the image of God. Tall, short, male, female, blue eyes, brown eyes... The miracle of being human is that we are all individual, even identical twins. We all have different strengths and limitations, and even preferences. We are all unique, but some of us are more different than others; we have a disability.

This booklet is a resource to help congregations to meet the needs of everyone – to make their churches and services more accessible to all; to explore the gifts of everyone in the church community; and to value the person with a disability as a person in their own right – a child of God like any other!

### What is disability?

According to the WHO, the term disability is an umbrella term referring to impairments which restrict an individual's ability to execute activities which may in turn affect an individual's participation in life situations. The extent to which an individual with a disability can execute activities will depend on their individual needs and how these needs are addressed, e.g. through personal support and assistive technology. Participation is often dependent on external factors such as levels of accessibility and social attitude.

### The nature of disability

A disability can be congenital (an individual is born with a disability), acquired or degenerative. We will all experience a disability in our lifetime, whether it is temporary, life-long or age related. Disability affects people in different ways. Everyone will have individual strengths and limitations.

**Physical Disabilities:** Absence of movement (e.g. a missing or paralysed limb) or reduction in movement or difficulty in coordination. A physical disability can affect mobility and hand function.

**Medical Disabilities:** Medical conditions may result in reduction in activities due to fatigue and mobility problems. People with chronic illness may be unable to leave their home or hospital.

**Blindness or Low Vision:** Some individuals will have no sight, while most individuals will have varying levels of residual vision.

**Deaf or Hard of Hearing:** Although some individuals have complete hearing loss, most people have some hearing.

**Brain Injuries:** Acquired brain damage, e.g. as a result of traumatic brain injury or stroke, can affect cognitive processing and memory.

**Learning Disabilities:** Developmental delay (e.g. Down Syndrome or Autism Spectrum Conditions). Conditions such as Cerebral Palsy can be associated with learning disability and epilepsy.

**Psychiatric Disabilities:** Individuals with mental illness and personality disorders are often excluded from community activities.

**Speech and Language Disabilities:** People with little or no functional speech may struggle to express themselves or may have difficulty understanding spoken or written language.

### **The impact of disability**

The degree to which a person's disability will impact on the individual's life varies depending on the individual, the level of impairment, the level of support and the environment in which they live.

Assistive devices and technologies such as wheelchairs, prostheses, mobility aids, hearing aids, visual aids, and specialised computer software and hardware increase mobility, hearing, vision and communication capacities. With the aid of these technologies, people with a reduction or loss in functioning are better able to live independently and participate in their environments.

Being loved as children of God is fundamental to our Christian faith. In valuing each and every person, we have a responsibility to support and encourage everyone to participate fully in the life of our faith community. This means that we all have a responsibility to build an inclusive church in which people of all abilities and at different stages in their faith journey are empowered to be active in all levels of church life.

### **An inclusive church**

Building an inclusive church is about our attitude towards each other. It is about being proactive in anticipating the needs of others by following guidelines to make our churches as accessible as possible. But it is more about listening to the needs of each other and having a determination to support individuals who have additional needs with dignity and respect. By doing this, we will be a community which ensures that all are welcomed, all are enabled to grow in discipleship and all are fully included in the life of the Church to participate fully as a valued member of the Body of Christ.

# Creating a Church for All

## Guidelines from the Church for All Group of the Scottish Episcopal Church

With the right support in place, there is no reason why a person with additional support needs cannot be a full member of the congregation, and carry out any ministries they wish to be involved in.

However, it is important to remember that each person has their own set of needs – do take the time to get to know them, and you will be better placed to help them. Don't be afraid to ask them directly and do include them in any discussions about how you can best support them, giving them as much time as they need without impatience.

You may also need to consider getting other congregation members on board, whether to assist in giving any support, or simply in creating the positive inclusive attitude towards those with additional support needs that is needed to enable everyone to be a valued member of the community. It does take time for people to get used to new situations, and new ways of being in a community.

Some ideas of things you can do to support those with additional needs are listed below. Although the ideas are associated with specific impairments, these can support individuals with other impairments as well. *The better support we provide for people with additional needs, the more accessible we make our church for everyone.*

The list is not exhaustive, and you may have other ideas which work better for your situation:

### **Language - The way we speak about disability is important:**

- Consider the person first - A person with a disability, not 'the disabled'.
- Think about the language used in liturgy, e.g. "All Stand".

Simple, well-structured instructions will benefit the whole congregation including children, people with communication difficulties and those with a learning disability.

### **Sight Impairment:**

- Where possible, liturgy books, hymn books, notice sheets and other resources could be available in large print and Braille.
- Is the text on resources written with a clear typeface that is easy to read?
- Where a screen is used, offer books for those who will not be able to see the screen.
- Is there good lighting to support those who have limited vision?
- Ensure hymns are announced, using both the hymn number and the first line of the hymn rather than relying on people being able to read hymn numbers off a hymn board or a notice sheet.
- Perhaps email notice sheets to people – they may have software that will read the notices to them.
- Think about the layout of pew sheets and other posters, documents etc. How big is the text? Is a lot of information all squashed into a small area?
- Could you provide audio copies of notice sheets and other information that is handed out?

### **Hearing Impairment:**

- Make use of a sound system including an induction loop.
- Encourage everyone to use the induction loop – having a 'loud' voice may not help people who use hearing aids.
- Ensure speakers are visible – on steps, in a pulpit. Remember that lip readers cannot see speakers who are facing away from them, hidden behind a lectern, or hidden behind taller people who may be sitting in front of them.
- Is there good lighting to support those who lip read?
- Are speakers clear, and are sentences in sermons and intercessions well-constructed?
- Consider the effect of the celebrant having their back to the congregation during the Eucharistic Prayer and other parts of the liturgy.
- Written copies of notices, sermons, readings, intercessions etc could be made available either before the service for the individual to follow, or after service for them to read anything that they may have missed.
- Are they serving, in the choir, or in other roles where people sit behind the point where, for example the sermon is preached, or in areas of the church excluded by the loop

system? Could they move to the front pews for this point in the service when they have no need to be where they would normally be?

### **Mobility Impairment:**

- Access to Church:
  - Is there Disabled Parking or drop off points close to the Church entrance?
  - Is there gravel, uneven paving slabs, steps that will restrict or impede the movement of the wheels on wheelchairs, walking aids or those who are unsteady on their feet?
  - Are there steps that restrict access to the building – can ramps be made available to allow wheelchairs and others who may have difficulty with steps to enter the building?
  - Are there grab rails the people can use to help support themselves as they move up stairs or ramps?
- Space in Church:
  - Are there internal steps to areas of the church which restrict access to some areas of the church for those who have mobility impairments?
  - Is there space at the top of ramps for those with walking aids and wheelchairs to rest without getting in the way of others – remember those pushing wheelchairs may be infirm themselves and need a rest after pushing a wheelchair up a ramp.
  - Is there space for wheelchairs to be situated within the congregation?
    - Are there seats next to them so that family members and friends can sit alongside them in the same row?
    - Does the wheelchair user have a choice on where they sit?
  - Is there space for wheelchair users to move around the church, for example if they would like to read the lesson, or to receive communion?
- Are those from the congregation who support those with mobility impairments, for example up and down steps for communion, fit to do so safely?
- Is there room for those with leg injuries for example to sit with their leg elevated in front of them? This leg room may also be required for those who are simply very tall!

### **Learning disability:**

- Having a learning disability does not mean that an individual is incapable of 'learning' and participating. The key is that instructions and processing may take a little longer.
- Be patient, slow down, use age-appropriate but clear language.
- Use graphic and symbol support with simple text on service sheets.
- Don't be frightened to include people who have a learning disability in liturgy – being familiar with liturgical rituals is appreciated by individuals who need structure and repetition.
- Work with people who have a learning disability and those who know them to identify how best to meet their needs.

**Children:**

- Is there a space where children can go if they get restless both in the church itself, and outwith the church, perhaps in another room – is access to that room discreet or highly visible?
- Is there a balance between allowing children to move around if they get restless, while at the same time asking parents/those with responsibility for the children to respect others need to be able to worship.

**Other:**

- Is there a space where those who cannot sit for too long to stand or move around should they need to?
- If you use pews, are they comfortable – may people need cushions?
- Is there an accessible toilet that is easily accessible?
- Is the seating set out in such a way that people may feel trapped in a long pew or row of chairs without an easy way of getting out should they feel the need to?
- Is there support for those who struggle to handle books, money for offerings or communion vessels?
- Are notice boards positioned so that all, including those in wheel chairs and of short stature can make use of them?
- Are water bowls provided for assistance dogs – does the congregation understand that they should not interact with the dog whilst it is working?

To download the guidelines please visit <http://vestryresources.scotland.anglican.org/>

**Please display them on your noticeboard in your church and/or hall**

